



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SQUIRREL ON PALOMAR MOUNTAIN TESTS POSITIVE FOR PLAGUE

Campers and Hikers Warned to Take Precautions

County environmental health officials urged campers and hikers to take simple steps to protect themselves Friday after routine monitoring and testing showed that a ground squirrel on Palomar Mountain had plague.

The squirrel, which was trapped at the Cedar Grove Campground, marked the first case of plague found this year.

Department of Environmental Health Director Jack Miller said it's not unusual to find plague in local mountains during warmer months — and that people could take simple steps to protect themselves from exposure.

"The big thing is to avoid contact with squirrels and the fleas that they can carry," Miller said. "Campers should set up tents away from squirrel burrows, and hikers and campers should never feed squirrels and warn their children not to play with squirrels."

Plague is a bacterial disease of wild rodents, but it can be transmitted to people by fleas that feed on the blood of a sick animal and then bite humans. There have been no locally acquired human cases of plague reported in San Diego County.

The County routinely monitors flea populations and takes measures to control those populations at campgrounds when necessary to reduce the potential for people coming into contact with them.

Plague Warning signs are posted in all areas where plague has been confirmed. Visitors, hikers and campers in rural mountain areas should look for these signs and always follow these easy precautions to prevent contact with fleas:

- Avoid contact with ground squirrels, chipmunks, and other wild animals.
- Do not feed, touch or handle wild animals.
- Do not rest, camp or sleep near animal burrows in the ground.
- Protect pets by keeping them on a leash, use flea control, or best of all, leave pets at home.
- Contact your doctor immediately if you become ill within one week of visiting a known plague area.
- Symptoms include a sudden onset of fever, chills and tender swollen lymph nodes.
- Do not touch sick or dead animals.

For more information about plague surveillance, call the Vector Control Program at (858) 694-2888 or visit the website at www.SDVector.com.

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